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New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signs invasive species bill

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New York will soon have a system of fines and penalties for transporting or possessing invasive species under a new law signed this week by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

The law, which passed the Legislature in June, will require the state departments of Environmental Conservation and Agriculture and Markets to develop regulations for combating the spread of the invasive creatures.

The regulations will likely apply to species such as the emerald ash borer — which has infected trees in Monroe, Ulster and Steuben counties, among others — and hydrilla, an aquatic weed found in Ithaca's Cayuga Lake inlet last year.

"This legislation ensures that the regulations governing invasive species are appropriate for New York's farming community and plant nurseries, while also protecting the environment," Cuomo said in a statement.

The law takes effect in 180 days, and a list of species and animals covered under it will be developed by the two state agencies.

A permit system for disposing of any of the creatures and plants will also be created.

Violators will be hit with fines that range from a written warning for a first offense to a fine of at least \$250 for subsequent violations. Penalties will be steeper for commercial fishermen or nurseries, from at least \$650 for a first violation, \$2,000 for a second and the possibility of a shutdown after subsequent offenses.

The bill was pushed for by environmental and farming groups, who pointed to the spread of the ash borer, the Asian long-horned beetle and hydrilla as a need for action.

"Considering the devastation that both the emerald ash borer and the Asian long-horned beetle have had on agriculture in New York, it is important that New York takes a proactive role in evaluating species prior to their introduction within the state and also once they have become established and necessary to eradicate," the New York Farm Bureau wrote in a memorandum supporting the bill.
